The Primary Long Vowels in Mongolian

by

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1.

Many years ago, Ramstedt noticed that the long vowels in Khalkha had resulted from the contraction of vowels of two adjacent syllables, the intervocalic consonant having disappeared.¹ Thus, Mo.² *qayā* has been *qayā* in Khalkha. On the other hand, Mo. *bagā* has not developed into *sa* but has remained *bagā* in Khalkha. These dual developments were discussed by Ramstedt in another article of his in which he came to the conclusion that these dual developments were due to different accentuation: *qayā* < *qayā* but *bagā* < *bagā*.³ Therefore it is surprising that Vladimir Tsvetkov who had accepted these observations of Ramstedt ⁴ set up his rather phantastic theory that the different developments had been due to the transition of the ancient Mongols from a hunting economy to animal husbandry.⁵

As long ago as in 1937, the author of these lines stated that

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¹ G. J. Ramstedt, Das Schriftmongolische und die Urgamundart phonetisch verglichen, JSFOu 21: 2, p. 21–24.
² Written Mongol.
⁵ op.cit., p. 241.
Written Mongolian made a phonic distinction between short and long vowels and gave such examples as *daga*-to follow and *daya*-to be able to lift, to overpower, and also such examples as *qayalgna* > Kh. *gälga* sgats. In this connection, I should remark that the formulation given in my Introduction is unfortunate. Instead of saying *γ* in the middle of words was preserved etc., I should have said *The consonant *γ* before a short vowel, and where I discussed the origin of the long vowels I should have added that *γ* (and some other consonants) disappeared only before a long vowel (originally a stressed vowel).

The correct solution of the problem was found in 1950 when simultaneously there appeared Professor Hattori's article and my article on the Velar Stops which was followed by my Comparative Grammar. In the latter work the disappearance of certain consonants and the contraction of the vowels into one long vowel is regarded as taking place in the so-called weak position, i.e., before a long vowel which had developed from an accented vowel.

It is important to remark that the groups Mo. *ayā, ayā, etc., have been preserved in regular correspondences and in old loan words in Tungus (Evenki, Solon), the second vowel always being long:

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2 Khalkha.

3 Poppe, Grammatika, p. 15.


5 Poppe, op.cit., p. 59, 60.


8 N. Poppe, Vergleichende Grammatik der altaischen Sprachen, Teil 1: Vergleichende Lauflehre, Wiesbaden 1960

9 Poppe, op.cit., p. 34.

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The Mongolian loan words in Tungus are important from that point of view that they give an answer to a number of questions. First of all, it is obvious that, at the time when the intervocalic consonant was still present in Ancient Mongolian (or Proto-Mongolian), the second vowel was still long, e.g., PMo. *imagin* > Sol. *imayā* *sgowt*. This stage was followed by another one in which the intervocalic consonant was represented by a spirant and the second vowel was already short:

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1 Evenki of Barguzin after N. N. Poppe, Materiali dlya issledovaniya tunguskogo yazika, Narodnie barguzinskie tungusov, Leningrad 1927, p. 38.


3 Solon after N. N. Poppe, Materiali po solonskomu yaziku, Leningrad 1934.

4 Middle Mongolian.
Ev.V. Ev.B keve < meadow, open space, swamp < Mongol.
keve < *kebēr < steppe>.

Ev.B dabu < smoke < M Man. dayū < id., cf. Dagur daly+a < to
calls. Mo. dayūn. Kh. nū voice, songs.

Ev.B ove < Mongol. *ove < Mo. ayūr < *ogūr, Kh. ār id.

Ev.V umul < Mongol. *umul < Mo. ayūl < *ugūl, Kh. ūl <
sounds.

Ev.V huruwa < thumb < Mongol. *uruwa < Mo. wurū <
*kuriyūn, Kh. ār < fingers.

On the basis of the Mongolian loan words in Tungus, the history
of the groups *agū < *ogū, *tungū, etc. can be represented as follows:
1. Proto-Mongolian *dayū < voices > Mo. dayū id.
2. Middle Mongolian *dayū < da< < voices. da=da< < calls
   > Dag. dawu< id.

I shall not dwell on cases in which Written Mongolian γ or 0
(= n, p, b, q, m, y) have disappeared and the vowels have been
contracted into one long vowel, because these cases are well known,
and examples of these developments can be found by the hundreds.
Here the following question will be dealt with: did long vowels occur
only after *p, *b, *q, *m, *y or also after other consonants? If they
occurred also after other consonants, what happened to the latter?

We shall examine all cases as far as possible. We shall see that
the consonant *k > Mo. 0 and k in the weak position, i.e., before
a long (original accented) vowel has become voiceless, i.e., developed
into 0, and 0 respectively, but has remained voiceless in the strong
position, e.g., Mo. daγu < M Man. daγu < *dakūm. Kh. dagū. Bur. 3

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1 Mongol.
2 This and some other examples and the idea that *k has developed into 0
   in this position were suggested to me by Professor Shirō Hattori in a letter
   of May 5, 1960.
3 Mo. 0ba- must be a borrowing, because *p in weak position usually
   disappears.
4 Lamut or Even after V. I. Cincius i L. D. Ries, Russko-évenskii slovar',
   Moskva 1952.
5 Mongolian saba must be a borrowing for the same reason as 0ba- <
   stolers.
6 After γ - the consonants *p and *b do not disappear in weak position,
   probably due to the fact that γ - together with the preceding vowel, became
   a diphthong in a rather early stage.

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2. The Primary Long Vowels in Mongolian
Mo. uno- <*udā>, Kh. ṣuvu-, Mgr. uša-*sto linger, remain in the same position, to be late = Yak. utā-*sto remain behind, to lag.
Mo. jida <*jidā, Kh. ṣidnāv <spear = Mgr. ḍidā id.
Mo. qada <*kada-*sto nail, to sew, to fix = Yak. ṣadā-*sto nails.
Mo. udaga <*udākān / *idākān > *idagan > Dag.1 yovagan shamanasā, Kh. ṣuguy id. > Ev.V idāken id., idākān shamanasā.
Mo. sudusan <*суда*savory, Kh. ṣuṇu-, Mgr. soșge id. = Ev. V sudusan id. (< Modern Mongolian).
Mo. qada <*kuda, Kh. ṣuṇu parents of a married couple, Mgr. ṣuṇā id. > Ev.Sh.2 kuda id.
Mo. qudaldu <*kudaldu-*sto trade, to sell, Kh. ṣuṇolo- id. = Mgr. ṣorv-. id.
Mo. budan <*būdan *sog, Kh. ṣuṇu id. > Yak. budan / bidan id.
Mo. unugan <*unukan *son, Kh. ṣunug id. > Ev.V unukan id.
Mo. šinaga <*šinakā *ladle, Kh. šanuug id. > Ev.V činakā id.
Mo. jala-* <*jalkā-*sto connect, to make longers, Kh. psalgu-, Mgr. șirpā- id. > Yak. salyā-*sto add, to make longer by attaching something.
Mo. gaiyqa <*gaiyikā-*sto admire, Kh. ṣiye- id. > Ev.V gaikā-*sto be surprised, astonished, Yak. șaiyā-*sto praise.
Mo. ūla-* <*ilkā-*sto distinguish, to discern > Yak. ilyah-*sto choose, selecte.
Mo. sonirqa <*sonirkā-*sto be interested, Kh. sonirqa- id. > Yak. sonuryā-*sto be interested in everything new.4

1 Dagur.
2 On this word see Albert E. Dien, A Possible Early Occurrence of Altaic idojan, CAJ, II, p. 12 ff.
surä- *to be finished, to be consumed, spent, to die > Yak. barä-*to finish, destroy.

Mo. darasun <*daräsun *wine* = Mngr. dërgä- id.
Mo. aral <*aral *island* > Kh. aral id. = Mngr. arä *a spot left open in a canal or in a river*.

Mo. qara <*kara *black* > Kh. qarä id. = Mogol qarë <*qarä id. > Ev.V. karä id.

Mo. untara- <*untarä- *to go out (light), to be extinguished* > Kh. *en*tar- id. = Mngr. n'terä-*to sleep*.¹

Mo. abura- <*apurä-*to have pity, to save, rescue* > Kh. *acr* -id. > Yak. abrä- / abirä-*to correct, to show grace*.

Mo. sayara- <*sagirä-*to decrease* > Kh. särä-*be slow, irresolute*.

Mo. jiyura- <*jigirä-*to knead* > Kh. nžur- id. = Mngr. yžirä-id.

Mo. qagdara- <*kagdärä-*to be worn out* > Kh. qaqtar- id. = Mngr. qaqtar- id.

Mo. qayura- <*kabürä-*to peel off* > Kh. žür- id. = Mngr. žürä-id.

Mo. tusa <*tusä *usefulness, profit* > Kh. tussu id. = Mngr. tussä-id.

Mo. buta <*butä *bush* > Kh. m'ut'v id. = Mngr. muda *plants growing in the shape of bushes*.

Mo. duta- <*dutä-*to be insufficient* > Kh. m'ut'v-id. > Yak. tutä-*to be behind*.

Mo. qata- <*katä-*to become hard* > Kh. qa't'v id. = Mngr. qa'at-id. > Ev.V. katän *Hard*, Yak. kitanq *hard*, kitäät-*to become hard*.

Mo. sayata- <*sagätä-* > Kh. sät'v-*to console* > Yak. sätä-*to console oneself, to amuse oneself*.

Mo. toqta- <*toktä-*to stop, to stand still* > Kh. t'og'tv-id. > Ev.V. toktö-id. = Yak. toqto-id.

¹ The suff. -rä- has a long vowel in Mongol, Yakut, and Evenki.
The observations made in section 2 lead to the conclusion that the vowels of a number of Mongolian suffixes were originally long. Such suffixes are:

1. Suffixes of noun-derivation:
   1. -gan / -gen < *kăn / *kên: Mo. udagăn shamaness, unalgan soab, tarbagăn marmot, kürgen son-in-laws, etc.
   2. - tô < - tô / - tô of deverbal nouns: Mo. sačuli labitations etc.

2. Suffixes of verb-derivation:
   1. - gə / - ge < * kă / * kă of causative verbs: Mo. jalgă to make longer, ilgă to distinguish, delgă to spread out, etc.
   2. - gina < * gina / * gina of deverbal verbs: Mo. irjagina to show the teeth,
   3. - iə / - iə < * iə / * iə of denominal verbs: Mo. daıqata to be a smith, dayula to sing, etc.
   4. - ra / - re < * ră / * ră of deverbal verbs: Mo. abura to save, unara to be extinguished, savara to last longs, etc.
   5. - ra / - re < * ră / * ră of denominal verbs: Mo. sonirga to be interested.

Another conclusion which is probably more important concerns the primary verb-stems which take the causative suffix -yă / - gă.

It is known that the verbal stems ending in a short vowel in various Mongolian languages take the causative suffix -ul / - âl: Mo. yul / yâl: Bur., Kh., Ord. aul / aul: cause to kill, Kalm. aul: from ala to kill = Mo. alayul: to make kill from ala to kill.

On the other hand, many verbal stems ending in a short vowel form the causative by adding the suffix -a / - a = Mo. yâ / - gă:

Mo. udâyă, Kh. yâa: to delay, to make become late from Mo. udaya.

Mo. qada, Bur. chadă: to cause to nail or sew from Mo. qada: nails.

Mo. qata, Kh. qa tăa: to make dry, to make hard from Mo. qata: to become dry, to become hards.
Mo. unay-, Kh. ung- - sto make fall down from Mo. uno- - sto falls.

Mo. toqay-, Kh. tq+ - sto make stand still, to establish, to take a decision from Mo. log- - sto stand stills.

Mo. sogay-, Kh. sg+ - sto make drunk from Mo. sog- - sto become drunk.

Mo. untaray-, Kh. untur- - sto extinguish from Mo. untar- - go out, to be extinguished.

It has been demonstrated above that the primary stems udu-, qada-, qala-, etc. end in a primary long vowel. From this the conclusion can be drawn that the causative suffix Mo. -γά - / -γε - can be taken as evidence that the stem-final vowel is long in origin. In other words, those verbal stems which take this suffix must have been ending in a long vowel. Of course, many original stems appear at the present time with other causative suffixes but this is due to analogy. There are such dual forms as Kh. ser- and serial = Mo. sereγ- and sereγδ- - sto awakens from sere- - sto awake. However, originally all stems of this kind took only the suffix -γά - / -γε -.

4.

The occurrence of primary long vowels in the first syllable in Mongolian was discovered recently. No mention of primary long vowels in the first syllable is found in Ramstedt’s and Vladimirov’s works. Even in his latest works, Ramstedt states that there is no evidence of a phonemic opposition of primary long vowels to short vowels in Mongolian. The same opinion was expressed in 1955 by the author of these lines who believed that all long vowels were of secondary nature.

The occurrence of primary long vowels in the first syllable was discovered by Hattori whose article was followed by the Comparative Grammar of the author of these lines.

Hattori reconstructed the original long vowels of Proto-Mongolian, basing himself on the Monguor and, to a lesser extent, Dagur data. The author of these lines reconstructed them on the basis of the Altaic comparative studies, i.e., by comparing Mongolian with Tungus and Turkic. The argument of the author was as follows: if Turkic and Tungus have primary long vowels and if Mongolian is related to Turkic and Tungus, there must have been primary long vowels in Mongolian, too. By comparing such words as Mngr. өөл - shoulder-blades with Turkmenian өөл - mane and Yak. өөл - under the mane of a horse or Mngr. мөө - stresses with Dag. мөө and Ev. мөө (< мөө stresses, the author came to the conclusion that Mongol and Dagur long vowels in these and some other words are primary in origin but not secondary as he had believed before.

In this article I am going to demonstrate that Mongolian primary long vowels can be reconstructed in the first syllable not only on the basis of Monguor and Dagur data or by comparing Mongolian data with those of Yakut and Turkmenian but also by basing one’s research on Mongolian loan words in Yakut and Tungus.

Before I proceed to a closer examination of Mongolian correspondences to the long vowels in Yakut and Turkmenian and to Mongolian loan words in Evenki and Yakut, I wish to remark that the very useful list of Turkmenian words containing long vowels, compiled by Räånnen, provides numerous examples such as:

Trkm. өөл - sreds = (or >) Mo. al id.

Trkm. бөя the husband of the sister of Ego’s wife = Mo. бөя < *боja id.

Trkm. дайя child = Mo. таqa, Kh. тɔα UNIVERSITY < *дəqa id.

Trkm. дайя - shoulder-blades = Mo. даγдриん < *дүгөрин - more under the saddles.

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2 Vergleichende Grammatik der altaiischen Sprachen, p. 92 ff.

Trkm. /qu/ < *qadın 'father-in-law', Mo. qadam < *kādum, Kh. qođam id., etc.
I shall proceed to the main discussion.

*ā

Mo. < *āku 'fur jacket, fur coats', Kh. ṣaxx̂ id., Mgr. ṣāx̂ 'women’s waistcoats' > Ev.V adaş ʷ 'women’s jackets'.
Mo. talā < *tāla 'plain, steppe, prairie', Kh. talō id. > Yak. talā 'field, prairie'.
Mo. janu < *jān-u- 'to threaten', Kh. dzanu- id., Mgr. āṭin-ī 'to hate, to menace' = Yak. sān id. > Ev.V sān id.
Mo. laγ < *lāγi 'silurus, shat-fish', Kh. laγ id. > Yak. lāγa 'common gremilus'.
Mo. čabi 'groine', Kh. t’sāγ id. > Yak. dānim 'belly, womb'.
Mo. saγ < *sāγ 'excrement, filths', Bur. haγ id. > Yak. sāγ 'excreta'.
Mo. tagi < *tāγi 'cup, bowl', Bur. taγ id. > Ev.V tāγ id.

*ō

Mo. očin < *očin 'spark', Kh. o'ti̠, Bur. ošin id. from *hōt < *pōt 'fire' > Ev.V. očin/ ošin 'spark' = Yak. وافق 'fire', Trkm. oti̠ id.
Mo. dom < *dōm 'fortune-telling', Kh. dom id., Mo. domog, < *dōmak 'stale, story' > Yak. tuom / duom < *dōm 'stove'.
Mo. bor, Bur. bor < *bōr 'clays' > Yak. buor 'searclay, clays'
Mo. gom < *kōm 'saddle-felt, saddle-cloth', Kh. xom id. > Ev.V kōm 'saddles', kōmān 'saddle covers'.
Mo. goša < *kōša 'enclosure, fence, town, city', Kh. χο'v id., Ord. ṣo'vi id. > Ev.V goša 'enclosures, goša-sto enface', ṣoša id.
Mo. jol < *jol 'happiness, good luck', Bur. sol id., Mo. jolγu-

Mo. soγor < *sōγor 'selinear, Kh. soγγor id., Mgr. soγor id. > Ev.V soγγor 'squint, cross-eyed'.
Mo. soni < *soni 'interesting, news', Kh. sōγ id. > Ev.V sōγ 'sore'.
Mo. toγ < *tōγa 'sellbow, bended', Kh. tογ id., Mgr. tūγi 'sellbows' = Ev.V tōγi < *tōγi id.
Mo. soγa < *sōγa- 'to be intoxicated', Mgr. soγa-_ < *sōγa- id., Kh. sōγ'r' id. > Ev.V sōγa id.
Mo. jōr < *jōγ-u- 'to plane', Kh. dōr-, Mgr. tōγi- 'to cut off, to make a sharp end' = Yak. swor < *jōγ- 'to plane', cf. Trkm. yōn- id., primary root *yō-.

*ū

Mo. julγa- < *julγa- 'to tear off, to pluck', Kh. oγylγa- 'to pluck' > Ev.V jūγa- id.
Mo. nura < *nāra 'saccine-in, landslides', Mo. nura- < *nārā- 'to cave in', Mgr. nāra 'saccine-in, nārā- 'to cave in' > Ev. nāra 'steep banks'.
Mo. guγ < *guγ 'wild goats', Kh. guγ id. > Ev.V guγ id.

*ū

Mo. jirγe- 'to cut off thin slices', Kh. ṣirγe- id., causat. of *jirγ- < *jir-γ, Mo. jirγi- 'thin straps, deverbial noun in -γ from *jirγ, Mgr. ńiri- 'to cut off thin lashes' = Yak. ńirγ- 'to tear = Turk. Osm. yirt- < *yirγ- 'to tear'.
Mo. ḏirγ < *kārmak 'snow', Kh. ḏārmak id. (*kārmak <
*q*

MMo. burge stö «sleas» = Mngr. sūre- id.

*š*

Mo. šilāgūsün < *šilagūsün stö lynx-, Kh. šīkūs id., Bur. šēlēhen id., Mngr. šēle < *šle id. = Yak. ūs < *hūs < *šē id.

*šō*

Mo. čōme < *čōme stö stone of a fruit, kernels-, Kh. čōma id. > Ev.V čōme < *čōme «kernels».
Mo. dōte < *dōte «nears-, Bur. dute id. > Ev.V dāterēy« straight, shortcuts».
Mo. ūl < *hūl < *pūl «swet, damp; nourishment» > Yak. ūl < *li, Turk. Osm. hūl, Trkm. hū'l / ēl «swet».
Mo. ās- < *ās- stö grow, increase, propagate-, Mo ūske- < *ūskē-stö make increases-, Kh. ās-, Mngr. āse- stö grow, increase > Yak. ūske- < *ūskē stö originates.
Mo. ās < *ās < *šē stö hatred, revenge-, Kh. ās id. = Yak. ūs < *šē «biles».
Mo. sōnū- < *sōn-ū- stö be extinguisheds, sōn «night»-, Mngr. sunū stö be extinguisheds = Ev.V sūe- stö be extinguisheds, sē- < *sē- stö extinguish» = Trkm. sōn- stö be extinguisheds.